2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

disease *ndaka*.[1] This disease, as we have seen, affects the sexually inactive when they are brought into contact with those who are sexually active. But the disease will only affect the members of the matrilineage of the errant person. For example, suppose a labour migrant is coming home from Southern Rhodesia and has, among other things, a few pounds of salt in his baggage for a gift to his relatives. Suppose also that while he is returning he has promiscuous intercourse. The salt becomes charged with sexual heat and if he gives it to any of his matrilineal relatives to cook with, they will contract this disease. He must therefore give the salt to members of another matrilineage, even if they live in the same village.

It is when the unity of the matrilineage is threatened, by either death or division, that its mystical value appears most clearly. When a member of the matrilineage dies the whole matrilineage is thrown into mourning and remains continent for three days. On the fourth day they perform a ritual purification and some members resume sexual relations, but the closest matrilineal relatives, such as the mother and uterine siblings, remain continent for the remainder of the mourning period, which is about 36 days.

It is tension within the lineage which is most closely attended by dire results. The most important reflex of this tension is accusations of sorcery. Good relationships among members of a matrilineage are adjured, mainly because friction opens the way to sorcerers. The Yao believe that sorcerers kill their matrilineal relatives so that they may share the flesh with other sorcerers. The sorcerer is fundamentally a wicked person and may kill any relative but is more likely to kill those whom he hates. Hence it is most important that relationships are kept amicable within a matrilineage for fear that sorcery ensues.

An interesting variation of the dangers of sorcery is the belief that sorcerers take the opportunity of squabbles within a matrilineage to kill one of the members. The rationale behind this is that the diviner's instruments are unable to detect the origin of the sorcery beyond the immediate cause. A diviner will indicate that the cause of death of, say, a child is sorcery, but that the witch is obscured behind the quarrelling words of some relative. Consequently, danger to a matrilineage ensues when one of its

[1] See Chap. V, p. 111.

3: Stannus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT? Yao FT?

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person, he may also give a goat. The rules is to wrap up the body of the dead, the goat is for the undertakers, *anila*.[1]

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Until eight or ten years ago, the Wayao buried their dead in a posture of complete flexion. The preparation of the body after death is carried out by friends from a neighbouring village who volunteer for the service. They are known as *anila*, (sing. *nihila*). Macdonald[2] thinks the word originally meant relatives; it has essentially the opposite meaning now. The corpse is washed in ordinary water and no ointment is made. The limbs, forcently, were then flexed on the body and at all the joints. The clenched hands were placed under the chin of the bent head or the hands were spread over the face of the flexed head, while the legs were tightly bent at the knees and brought up close against the abdomen. The corpse was securely bound in this position and adorned with a loin-cloth of bark. The body of a man found *still* and extended was a source of great trouble. Water was heated, and the body bathed until it was so relaxed as possible. As much force would then be applied as was necessary to gain the required degree of flexion, the bones often being broken in the process.

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In the case of a woman, her female friends put on her bark-cloth loin covering, but the washing and turning up of the body were usually done by men unless there were some women particularly skilled in the operation.

The flexed body was then set up on the deceased's sleeping mat within the hut, and from time to time, so long as it remained exposed, it was washed, people coming from other villages to offer their services for this task. Watchers sat continually by the body, the wife and perhaps a brother on either side, while others slept in the hut to take their turn later. The rest of the mourners sat on the veranda about the door.

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As soon as the *anila* had finished their work, wailing began, started by the wife and carried on by all the women of the village and the women relatives from elsewhere. Wailing continued all day until about ten in the evening, and then started again between two and three in the morning. This went on for three or four days or was intermittent for a longer time, always recommencing with the arrival of a party from another village. I have never heard of flour being put on the heads by Yao mourners, as mentioned in *Africana*.[3]

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News of a death was always sent to all the relatives, and burial might be delayed to allow for the arrival of those from a distance. Under such circumstances, the body was enclosed in a casing of bark, the ends being closed by bamboo pegs. Exaggerated signs of grief were sometimes made by the mourners who beat their breasts with their hands while they knocked their heads against the ground or a wall, but the Yao did not indulge in the extreme of the Anyanja near Lake Chilwa who practised a kind of flagellation, the walkers within the house resisting any new-comers at the door and beating them with sticks. This treatment was not resented. Women alone did the wailing; a man indulging in such expression would be laughed at. His part in the old days when the natives possessed firearms was

[1] Vide infra, p. 244. [2] Op. cit., vol. i, p. 168. [3] Ibid.

765 [539] to fire off his gun as long as his powder lasted. During the period of mourning, drumming went on continuously, *chindimbo* being played on the three small drums called *ndemu*.

With the exception of the flexed attitude of the body, the foregoing description is a correct account of what happens today. The body is now fully extended.

767 764 The *awile* are two or four in number, although other friends may assist in all their services. On about the third day, the *awile* sew up the body in bark cloth, completely enveloping it; a bamboo needle is used and left sticking in the cloth at the last stitch. The body is then enclosed in a mat slung on a pole, and carried from the hut to the grave. First, the procession makes a round of the village, passing by all the houses which the dead man used to visit, and over all the paths he used to cross. His children and those of his relatives under seven or eight years old gather in the village, and throw pieces of charcoal toward the body as it passes, "so that they shall forget the dead man," or run after the corpse, while some one sprinkles medicine over them.

764 [539] As the procession leaves the village, it is headed by the drums playing *chindimbo*, but after a few hundred yards, only the *ching'anga* drum, now called *chimanda*, beats time for a short distance; the procession then goes on quietly. Following the drums, walks the mother or another relative carrying flour with which the grave will be marked out. Behind this mourner, the body is borne by the *awile*. The *awile* are always the first to carry the body, but are later relieved by other friends of the deceased; no one would ever ask to be relieved.

[114] After the chief mourner, follow the other relatives and friends, the men first, the women behind. Boys just back from their *unyago* attend to learn the customs. All the relatives of the deceased go to the burial, contrary to Macdonald's account.[1]

In this order, the procession reaches some two thirty or forty yards from the place of burial where the corpse is put down in the shade, *mtale*, "resting place", and while the women and part of the men watch beside it, the *awile* proceed to the burial place. They cut branches from a sacred tree, and strew them on the path. On approaching the appointed spot, they clap their hands in salutation, asking that the burial ground be opened to them.

The head *mbile* chooses the site where the grave shall be dug, after which the mourner marks out the limits with the flour she has brought. In the days when the body was buried in contracted posture, a circular grave was dug just big enough to allow two men to work in it. Eight feet was the usual depth but this was decided by the deceased's spouse, if he were living, otherwise, by his near relatives. In the east side of this circular well, a cave was excavated, just large enough to admit the contracted corpse. When all was prepared, the body accompanied by all the mourners, was brought from *mtale* to the graveside. The chief *mbile* with a friend of the man's family and one of his wife's, standing in the grave received the body and placed it in the cave, resting on a mat and covered with bark cloth. The body lay on its side with its back toward the well, and its face looking

[1] Op. cit., vol. I, p. 188.

3: Stannus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7

toward the east. After adjusting the body in its place, the sukle would tear open the shroud over the ear, and pour on to the pieces some powdered beads to be used by the dead man as money in the hereafter. Except in the case of chiefs, no objects were buried with the dead, contrary to Macdonald's description [1] of the Amangoche. The pole on which the body had been carried to the grave was broken into bits and together with any stick that had been used to measure the body for the cave, was placed in the grave. The opening into the chamber was then closed by a mat fastened over it by pegs and supported by pieces of wood. The *sukle* clambering out of the well, pushed the first earth backward into the grave with their elbows, after which the rest of the earth was shovelled in quickly, and a heap made at the surface. The ground about this mound was swept clean with a bunch of leaves by some one walking backward so that no footprints were left; the bunch of leaves was thrown on top of the mound. No medicine was put in the grave, nor were the household utensils placed on the mound, as Macdonald states concerning the Amangoche.[2]

For some years past, the type of grave made among the Yao has resembled that of the *Anyanja*,[3] a long pit with a chamber scooped out along the whole length of one side. In this, the corpse is placed in a fully extended position so that it lies on its back with the feet toward the east. With this exception, the account given above holds good for the present day. The method of suspending the corpse in a mat slung on forked sticks within the grave, mentioned in *Africana*,[4] is not found among the Amachinga Yao.

On the way back to the village, two *sukle* lead, followed by the men, the women, and lastly, by the other *sukle*. First, all wash, the men upstream, the women downstream; no one may wash another's back. The hoes used in digging the grave are also washed; hoes are never washed on any other occasion.

During the funeral, some responsible old man is left in charge of the village with several younger men to assist him. Just before the return of the funeral party is expected, the old man sends one of the younger men to set medicine at the side of the path along which the mourners will pass. This medicine is made from the bark of the *mpingo* tree and is used for purification; it is placed in a shard. Each person as he arrives at the spot squats down, dips the little finger of each hand into the medicine, and passes the fingers between the little toe and the third toe of the corresponding foot. The last comer throws any remaining medicine into the bush. As they near the village, a gun is fired and wailing is resumed for a few minutes, after which it ceases altogether. The old man who has been left in charge of the village always inquires whether all has gone well at the interment.

That evening, the time is passed in singing *chinkinda*.[5] All those who attended the burial, sleep in the village, and if the deceased's relatives can afford to provide the necessary food, all remain in the village for a number of days equal to the period which elapsed between death and burial. Sometimes, when burial was long delayed, the mourning party

[1] Op. cit., vol. I, p. 307.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Stannus, 'Notes on natives of British Central Africa,' op. cit., p. 333.
[4] Macdonald, op. cit., p. 306.
[5] Vide index, p. 307, 370.

3: Stannus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7

765 might not break up for a week, but the practice was often modified to some degree, people returning to their homes during the day and coming back each night to sleep in the deceased's village. At the present time, there is a tendency to cut the proceedings short, and the mourners generally disperse on the second day after the funeral. This period of waiting is usually whiled away by playing and singing *ekindimba*.

768 765 On the day before the company leaves the village — now, often on the day after the funeral — the ceremony of shaving the head takes place. The *awilo*, assisted in the case of a large party, by those who helped at the burial, shave the heads of all the dead man's relatives. When this is completed, they begin to tear down the deceased's house. The grass from the roof, with the hair removed from the heads of the relatives, is carried to the cross-roads and burned. The walls of earth are torn down and made into a heap; on the top, a stick is raised, and at its base is placed the dead man's snuff box. Sometimes a cactus euphorbia, *ngochi*, is planted on the mound and cassava round about. The snuff box is kept replenished with snuff. This, with the cassava, is reserved for the *awilo;* no one else may partake of them.

While the house is being pulled down, the chief *mbilo* ties around the neck of the widow a single string of beads or a small piece of calico, *ng'enji*. After the house has been demolished, the *awilo* return to their homes and on the following morning, everyone else departs.

767 The position of *mbilo* is a strange one. Every man in the course of his life probably acts as undertaker for some friend; many have probably performed the service several times. He receives no regular payment, but beads, and, nowadays, coins are often thrown into the pot of water with which he wets the heads of those he shaves after the funeral, and he has the freedom of the village in which he has so acted forever afterward, the degree of freedom being determined by the distance which he has travelled to officiate. When Wandalama died, a headman named Chisui from Makanjila's on Lake Nyasa, over a hundred miles away, acted as one of the *awilo*. The occasions on which he revisited Malemya's village are well remembered, as they were marked by much frolicking and some obscenity. He was the recipient of enormous presents of fowls, sheep, and anything else he cared to take, and having commandeered men from the village to carry these gifts for him, he would leave, accompanied by all the people, yelling and shouting their joy at seeing him again.

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Any fowls or other provisions that friends may present to the deceased's relatives at the time of the funeral to help defray expenses are given to the *awilo;* no one else may eat them. Some may be kept against the next death in the family.

769 633 A few days after the funeral, recourse is had to the chief to settle whether any action must be taken in regard to the cause of the death. Some near relative of the dead man will be chosen for this purpose; he must not be shaved by the *awilo* at the time of the funeral. The consultation takes place at some secluded spot outside the village. The chief always brings some one with him to witness what is said. On arriving at the appointed place, the chief salutes the unshaven mourner who is probably accompanied by other relatives, and

3: Stannus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7

then listens to an account of the circumstances attending the illness and death. The point at issue is whether there is any evidence pointing to death from unnatural causes which requires consulting a diviner. The chief practically always agrees with the relatives, and it is said that he will never press them to go to the *wachisanga* unnecessarily. The case may end with this conference, or here may begin the long series of events described under *usavi*.[1]

During the month subsequent to the funeral, certain taboos have to be observed. The widow may not bathe, and with the exception of the *awilo*, all who attended must refrain from sexual intercourse. At the expiration of this period, beer is brewed in the village, and all the friends and relatives are again summoned. This beer-drinking is called "the beer of rottenness," or "the beer of resignation." In addition to the beer, food is provided, and everyone helps himself without ceremony. *Chindimba* is sung and danced and at the present day, bands of trained dancers attend, including *ching'wenyeng' wenye*.[2] A pot of beer is sunk into the ground, marking the site of the dead man's house. The night of *matapata*[3] sees husbands and wives reunited, and the widow may go through ceremonial intercourse with a man appointed for the purpose called *lituwu* or *mbilo*. Sometimes the widow refuses *lituwu*, and is given medicine instead to cleanse her; her body is then no longer "hot" and likely to bring disease to those about her. A widow does not marry again for two or three years. A young man who loses his wife has no longer any standing in her village after *matapata*. He is usually given a present, with the suggestion that he go elsewhere. After the death of an infant, the mother is considered unclean. She sleeps on a mat apart from her husband till after the ceremony of shaving, and then undergoes a ceremonial coitus with her husband — in which case he is called *lituwu* — after which, ordinary cohabitation is resumed. If she has been a widow, or if the child was born "with disease,"[4] another man acts as *lituwu*.

The morning following *matapata*, all the fires in the village are extinguished. A fresh blaze is then kindled with the fire-drill, *lumangu*, either in the chief's house or in some spot nearby, and from there, fire is carried to all the houses. The ashes of the old fires, the stones supporting the cooking pots, and the porridge sticks are taken to the cross-roads, and there destroyed. Everyone then shaves all his own hair, head, axillae, and pubis. The custom of the second shaving by the *awilo*, described in *Africana*,[5] is, I think, an adaptation from the Anyanja. A year later, beer is again brewed, and all the relatives summoned to the village to partake of it. There is dancing, but no ceremony.

The Yao bury their dead in regular graveyards in wooded country, the thicker the forest the better, often two or three miles away from a group of villages. Different villages bury their dead in different parts of the burial ground; relatives are usually buried near one another. Graves are never revisited, and no one would enter a graveyard except at the time of a funeral, and then only after obtaining permission from the chief. Such spots are

[1] Vide infra, p. 268.
[2] Beer-drinking.
[3] Macdonald, op. cit., p. 111.
[4] Vide infra, p. 270 and Pl. I.
[5] Vide infra, p. 268.

10: Sanderson D-5 (ca. 1920)1922 FT7 Yao FT7

The man and boys now pass through the arch in order of seniority; each splashes himself with the water in the trough, but neither speaks nor rinses the mouth. The women come next, led by the head-wife of the chief; the latter rinses her mouth and, instructed by the doctor, repeats a prayer similar to that offered by her husband. The remainder of the women merely splash themselves, like the men, before passing through the arch. All then return to the village, where the *pyajila* is continued.

Finally the doctor takes the hammer-head from the trough and hands it to the chief, who refits the haft into it, and, a hoe having been placed on the ground, goes through the form of forging the latter by beating it with the hammer. He then scrapes the ground with the hoe as if clearing a place overgrown with grass; he does not dig with it as in hoeing up the ground for planting seed. After this rite the chief again bathes in medicated water similar to that in the trough, and the ceremony is complete.

Whereas the *pyajila* ceremony and its adjunct, the rite of the arch, are now but rarely performed, no Yao will omit the rite of purification after a death in his family. This ceremony consists of two essential parts, both protective against the *ndaka*, a disease characterised by dropsy and supposed to be contracted by contact with a corpse, or by association, especially by sharing a meal, with those who have been in such contact. The first of these parts is bathing in certain medicines, which protects the bather from *ndaka*, and the second consists of a sort of communion meal, shared by all friends and especially relatives with those who have been contaminated, and designed to protect those friends and relatives.

The decoction for bathing is made by soaking the roots of *lugwakambuti* and *lumlemela* in water, together with the bark of *mkomwa*, one piece each from the east and west aspects of the tree; the water assumes a reddish tint, and the whole body is bathed.

The communion-meal consists of porridge made from any kind of flour or of rice, and some *nguandi* beans. In the latter some scorched and powdered root of *mandanyelele* is mixed, with a little salt. All near relatives of the deceased must partake of this meal, as well as their wives and their near relatives; part is carefully put aside for the use of any relative unable to be present at the ceremony.

Latterly, since the spread of Islam among the WaYao, this rite has become confused with the distribution of food to the poor at the funeral of a Muslim, and the Arabic word *sadaqa* ("charity") is now generally used for it, to the exclusion of its wider, correct meaning.

It may be mentioned here that after the death of a child the father is denied access to his wife for a period of about three weeks, and the first act must be one of *coitus interruptus*.

MEREDITH SANDERSON.